

**Chairman Roy Blunt Opening Statement
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies**

**Hearing to review to Review the FY2017 Budget Request & Budget Justification
for the U.S. Department of Education**

March 10, 2016

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning. Thank you, Acting Secretary King, for appearing before the Subcommittee today to discuss the Department of Education's FY2017 budget request. There are few people who embody what our education system can mean to children and young adults better than you. This is your first time before the Subcommittee and we look forward to hearing your testimony.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention this is Mr. Tom Skelly's last time appearing before this Subcommittee. He is retiring this month from the Department of Education after 41 years, including the last 19 as budget director. The Committee thanks you for your years of service and for the technical expertise you have provided this Subcommittee in particular.

The Department of Education funds many critical activities to help students get into and through college, and prepare the next generation of workers for the jobs and careers of the future.

The FY2017 discretionary budget request for the Department of Education is \$69.4 billion, a \$1.3 billion, or 2% increase above FY2016.

My overreaching concern with this request is that the increase of \$1.3 billion for the Department of Education dwarfs the total increase for all of non-defense discretionary spending – which is \$40 million. Further, this increase is only made possible by budget gimmicks within the Department of Health and Human Services budget request, including cutting discretionary funding for the National Institutes of Health by \$1 billion.

We have many shared priorities reflected in the budget request. It is my hope we can work together to identify priorities and find common ground while adhering to budget caps.

I was pleased to see an increase for charter schools, which have been a critical component to ensuring children have access to high quality elementary and secondary schools regardless of where they live. Last year's significant funding increases for Title I and special education were maintained. Finally, the maximum Pell grant will increase from \$5,815 this coming school-year to an estimated \$5,935 next year.

However, I am disappointed, given the large increase in the Department's request that the budget once again cuts funding for the Impact Aid Payments for Federal Property program. That program, like all of Impact Aid, represents a core aspect of the Federal government's commitment to the parts of the country impacted by the presence of Federally-owned land. The Subcommittee has rejected this proposal repeatedly in the past and I am certain we will again.

I also continue to question how the Department is managing the servicing of Federal student loans. Specifically I'm concerned with how the Department allocates new loans to student loan servicers. We should do more to ensure student borrowers have access to the best service possible. I hope we can work together on this issue going forward.

Finally, I remain concerned about the Department's consistently heavy hand in regulating institutions of higher education. We have built a great higher education system in this country, in large part, because the Federal government has supported it, without trying to control it.

Last year we helped convince the Department to abandon its misguided college ratings system. This was the right decision. However, the Department still continues to move forward with several proposals that exert unprecedented control over higher education.

For example, with the Gainful Employment regulation, the Department is unilaterally establishing significant policy that will impact hundreds of thousands of students. This regulation is a blunt tool that uses one single metric to measure the quality of a higher education program, and will shut down good programs with the bad. We shouldn't judge our education system based purely on how much a student earns when they graduate. That's almost antithetical to higher education.

Getting these policies right is difficult. That is why they should be addressed through the legislative process, and not by the Department shoehorning significant changes into longstanding law that never meant to address this specific issue.

Dr. King, while there are clearly issues on which we disagree, I know we both share a strong desire to fund programs that benefit all students and support increased educational opportunities in every State. I look forward to working with you during your first full year at the helm at the Department.

Thank you.

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